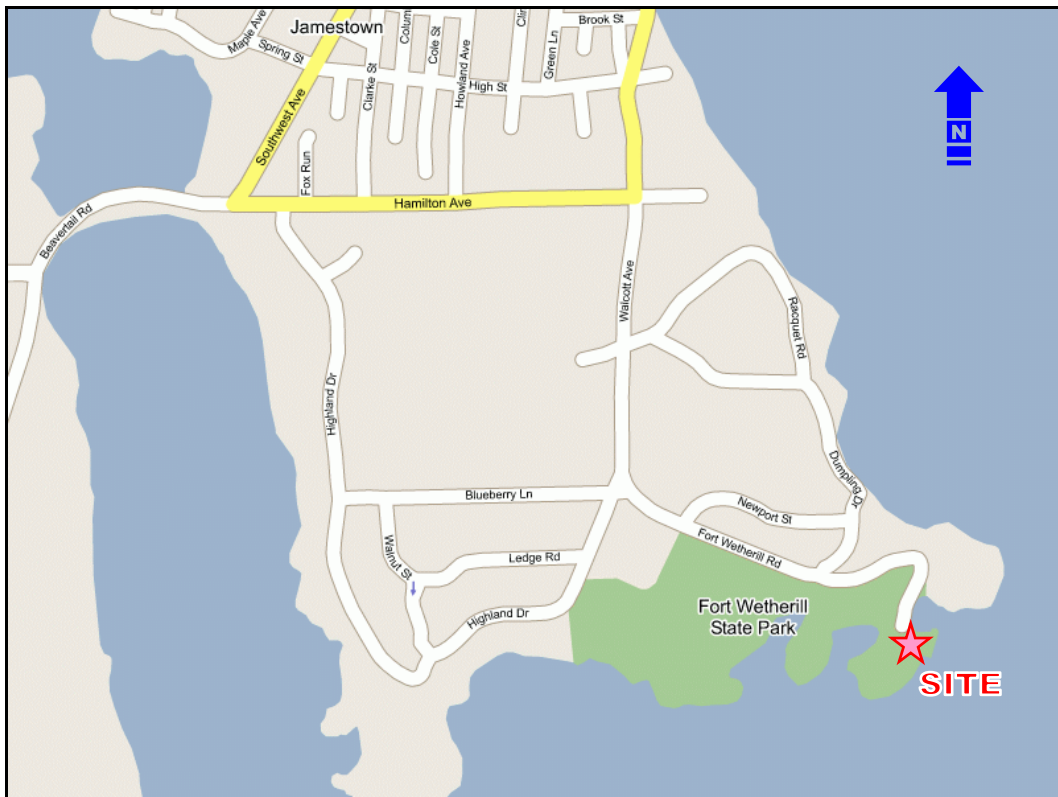


Site No. 17

FORT WETHERILL

Jamestown
Fort Wetherill Road



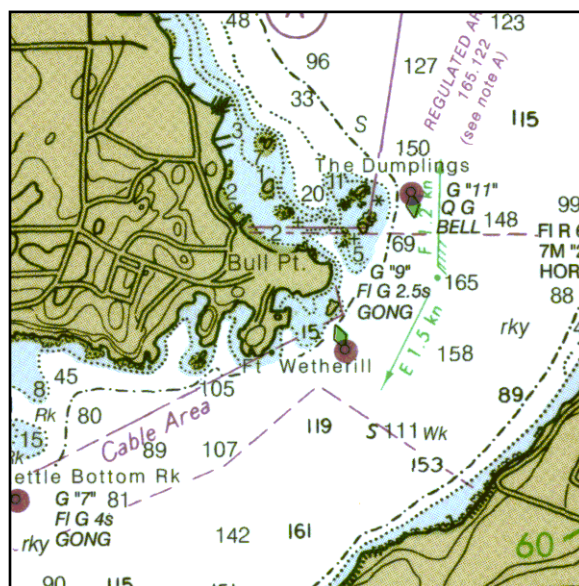
FORT WETHERILL

Site Description

Fort Wetherill is the site of a former coastal defense battery and training camp located along a small peninsula at the southeasterly end of the island of Jamestown. Though not managed as part of Fort Wetherill State Park (west of the site), this state-owned parcel is accessible to the public and is currently home to the Marine Fisheries Section of the RIDEM Division of Fish & Wildlife. In addition to Marine Fisheries offices and facilities, the site also hosts a small recreational boating harbor and a garage facility for the Jamestown Department of Public Works. Fishing at the site is supported by a manmade bulkhead along the easterly shoreline, which is maintained by the RIDEM for public access. Directly to the west, Fort Wetherill State Park supports a multitude of outdoor recreation activities and is renowned for the excellent scuba diving offered at this location.

Location Assessment

Bay Location. Situated directly across from Fort Adams State Park along a relatively narrow stretch of the lower East Passage, Fort Wetherill once served as a strategic military installation and is characterized by its rocky shoreline and high granite cliffs. In addition to serving as the main navigation channel for Newport and other ports north, these waters are also heavily used for recreational boating and sailing, though both were observed to occur well removed from the shoreline at this location (see Photos 1, 2, 7). On-site laboratory and boat-repair facilities support aquatic research uses by the Marine Fisheries Section, and a small harbor provides docking for RIDEM vessels and small recreational craft (Photo 5). The two small coves to the west of the site (accessed by Fort Wetherill State Park) are popular for scuba diving.



Recreational fishing at the site occurs primarily along the bulkhead (Photos 1, 2, 3), though more ambitious anglers are known to fish from the rocky shoreline to the south of the parcel (Photo 7) and points further west within the state park. From the Online Recreational Fishing Survey, common shoreline catch within the lower East Passage consists of Striped Bass, Bluefish, Summer Flounder, Scup, Tautog, and Squid, all of which were reported in significant numbers spring through fall. While not assessed for aquatic life support use in the *State of the State's Waters Report*, waters in this area are open to shellfishing and have been designated a water quality goal of SA (high quality) by the RIDEM (see Appendix B).

Land Location. Fort Wetherill is located at the southeasterly point of the island of Jamestown. For out-of-town visitors coming to the site (from North Kingstown via the Jamestown-Verrazano Bridge or from Newport via the Claiborne Pell Bridge), the most direct route is a 10-minute drive from the Newport Bridge toll interchange via Canonicus and Walcott Avenues. The town center of Jamestown (as well as the nearest RIPTA bus route) is approximately 1.5 miles from the shoreline site.

Land uses in the vicinity of this site consist of open space / public recreation to the west (Fort Wetherill State Park), and low-density residential to the north and northwest. In addition to housing the Marine Fisheries Section in refurbished historic military buildings, this site also hosts a Jamestown Department of Public Works garage facility directly west of the small harbor (see Photo 6). Ruins of the old military installation are located on the small hill overlooking the East Passage entrance.

Environmental Constraints and Permitting. Coastal features of the Fort Wetherill site consist of both the banks of the rocky shoreline and the edge of the manmade bulkhead currently managed as a fishing area. Waters along this shoreline are designated by the CRMC as Type 1 (Conservation Area) waters, with the small boat harbor north of the bulkhead serving as the boundary between these and Type 3 (High-Intensity Boating) waters to the north. Research also indicates that there are known eelgrass beds in the vicinity.

Facilities Assessment

As previously noted, current recreational fishing use of the site is focused along the bulkhead defining the easterly shoreline south of the harbor (see aerial photo), which is managed and maintained by the RIDEM Division of Fish & Wildlife. Appearing structurally sound but largely unimproved since previous uses, this structure is characterized by a patchy concrete/gravel surface and assorted marine debris and equipment (see Photos 1, 2, 3). In addition to the low rail running along its easterly and southerly sides, the bulkhead is on a smooth grade with the upland visitor parking area and appears to be useable by persons with disabilities (Photo 5). Anglers interviewed at the time of site visit were reasonably satisfied by the quality of fishing access offered, though one angler did note that an underwater cable line running parallel to the bulkhead is often the cause of snagged lines. No trash receptacles are provided; signs are attached to the low rail of the bulkhead indicating the RIDEM “take in / take out” trash policy. The site was observed to be relatively free of litter at the time of visit.

Parking for fishing use of the site is provided by a moderately-sized lot at the terminus of Fort Wetherill Road (Photos 6, 7) offering 37 striped spaces (including 2 designated handicap spaces). While parking is shared with RIDEM Marine Fisheries staff and recreational boating associated with the harbor, these uses appear to coexist quite well, as times of peak fishing and boating use generally coincide with minimal presence of Marine Fisheries staff. Additional parking is possible along the side of Fort Wetherill Road (within the site only), and visitors can also park in the Jamestown Public Works lot when this town facility is closed.

Existing Site Conditions

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
<i>Existing Fishing Facilities</i>			X	
<i>Parking</i>			X	
<i>Compatibility with Surrounding Land / Water Uses</i>			X	
<i>Statewide Transportation Accessibility / Public Transit</i>		X		
<i>Site Aesthetics</i>			X	
	Low	Medium	High	
<i>Water Quality (see Appendix B)</i>			X	

Priority for Capital Improvements: **Low**

As the Fort Wetherill site currently provides quality fishing access to the public (ample parking, good structure, productive fisheries), the necessity for improvements to facilities is relatively low. Additionally, the environmental constraints posed by these waters (Type 1 waters, eelgrass) and established site uses (recreational harbor, RIDEM Marine Fisheries facilities) would appear to limit the potential for the development of additional fishing structure. While not vital to the function of the facility, the bulkhead could well benefit from surface enhancements, both to increase the public's safety and enjoyment of the site as well as to better delineate the fishing area from boating uses along its northerly side. At a low to moderate cost, this could potentially be achieved through the installation of safety rails, removal of obsolete elements, resurfacing of the bulkhead, and addition of fishing-related amenities such as benches and cutting boards.



Photo 1. Fish & Wildlife bulkhead looking northeast. Newport Harbor is visible in the background.



Photo 2. Recreational fishing along bulkhead.



Photo 3. Looking south along bulkhead to East Passage entrance.



Photo 4. Harbor and dock facilities north of the bulkhead.



Photo 5. Access to bulkhead fishing area. RIDEM Marine Fisheries facilities are on the right.



Photo 6. Visitor parking area looking north. The Jamestown Public Works garage and parking area are visible in the background.



Photo 7. Visitor parking area looking south. Fort ruins are accessible beyond this lot.



Photo 8. Fishing along rocky cliffs at southerly end of the site.